

S-E-C-R-E-T

1 December 1964

IA STAFF NOTE

SUBJECT: Peron: To Return or Not to Return?

SUMMARY

Juan Domingo Peron almost certainly will not return to Argentina in the foreseeable future. His repeated avowals that he will return in 1964 probably have been designed to undercut neo-Peronist leaders eager to replace him and who may be susceptible to the overtures of the Illia Administration. Peron may stage a visit to Paraguay -- a move also calculated to disrupt President Illia's relations with the leaders of the Armed Forces -- some time before the Argentine congressional elections (14 March 1965).

1. Juan Domingo Peron, former Dictator-President of Argentina (1946-1955), has repeatedly promised his followers that he will return from exile in 1964. In view of the known determination of the Armed Forces that he shall not be permitted any chance to regain power, Peron's posturing probably has other purposes.

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2. In our opinion Perón is maneuvering to combat the efforts of some neo-Peronist leaders to take over control of the Peronist movement. Those efforts have been encouraged by certain tactics the Illia Administration has taken to split Perón's following and to secure the cooperation of moderate Peronists. While the pronouncement that Perón's return is imminent has stirred considerable enthusiasm among the Peronist rank and file, it has evoked few huzzahs from the more moderate Peronist leaders. Furthermore, Perón has put the present Peronist leadership in Argentina on-the-spot by charging it with preparing the way for his return. If those leaders fail to effect his return -- and the odds against this are prohibitive -- they may find it difficult to exonerate themselves in the eyes of the Peronist masses. At the same time the alarms created by Perón's maneuvering may disrupt Illia's relations with the Armed Forces, still the real locus of political power in Argentina.

3. Perón may prolong the drama by making his return dependent upon an impressive Peronist showing in the 14 March 1965 congressional elections. This would require a closing of ranks and the purging of luke-warm Peronists showing any susceptibility

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to overtures from the Illia Administration. Even a Peronist success of the magnitude of that achieved in the March 1962 elections, however, would not ensure Perón's return. An Illia Administration that allowed Peronist candidates to achieve an electoral victory probably would suffer the same fate that befell President Arturo Frondizi in March 1962 -- ouster by the Armed Forces. Even if Peronist candidates were not permitted, a substantial blank vote (25-35%) probably would bring a reimposition of close military guardianship as assurance against Perón's return.

4. There is about an even chance that Perón will make a trip to South America before the elections. If he does, he probably will visit Paraguay, where he was given asylum after his ouster by the Armed Forces (1955). Perón's presence in neighboring Paraguay would give the Argentine military leaders a case of jitters even more severe than the one they are having now. Their obsession with preventing Perón from regaining power could lead them into repressive action against the Peronists. Although circumstances such as these are not likely to return

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Peron to power, they could delay indefinitely the incorporation of the bulk of the Peronists into the body politic of the nation. And until that occurs political stability will continue to be a Will o' the Wisp in Argentina.



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